

# Acadiana gains state representation with population increase

DA FEB 10 2011

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✓ Acadiana's growth during the past decade, as shown in the recent release of 2010 U.S. Census data, sets the region up to gain political representation in Baton Rouge as the redistricting process begins.

Rick Gallot, chairman of the Louisiana House and Governmental Affairs Committee, said the "increase in population here makes it a viable possibility" for Acadiana to gain that representation by possibly "absorbing an additional seat."

Gallot, a Democrat representing Louisiana's 11th House district, spoke Tuesday at the Petroleum Club of Lafayette during the Kiwanis Club of Lafayette's weekly meeting.

Gallot was reluctant to say this region would gain representation in either the state house or senate, but said the booming population here may possibly spur that increased representation.

"Population equality is the paramount factor that has to be applied," Gallot said. "The primary goal is to have equal populations in the districts."

District lines will be redrawn to reflect population tallies from the 2010 Census, and some districts that experienced substantial growth will have to be split or reshaped to keep the number of people in each district across the state even.

Lafayette City-Parish President Joey Durel, upon viewing the Census data this past week, said

he believes Acadiana will likely gain a seat in the state's House of Representatives and possibly in the Senate.

"Acadiana has been on the short end for many, many years of voting blocks from New Orleans and other areas," Durel said. "That's why it's so important for our state legislative delegation from this area to work well together. We have an opportunity where the rest of the state can realize they have to come to the Acadiana delegation to get things done."

Gallot said the state will have 105 House of Representative districts, each with an idea population of 43,174 people. The 39 state Senate districts will ideally contain 116,240 people.

The state will also redraw district lines for the Louisiana Public Service Commission, Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Louisiana Supreme Court in addition to recreating U.S. Congressional District lines.

Gallot said the state will lose one U.S. representative, dropping to six congressmen from seven and putting an ideal population of 755,562 in each of those districts.

"There is always potential for contention," Gallot said. "There will be at least two congressmen who end up in the same district. Which one it's going to be, we don't yet know."

Gallot emphasized that state government is trying to make the redistricting process as transparent as possible while taking into

account public opinion.

"This is your state," Gallot said. "These congressional lines affect you. We absolutely are making every effort we can to make this process open to the public."

To gauge how the public will respond to various redistricting scenarios — like keeping together or splitting parishes — Gallot said he is hosting "The Roadshow," a tour of public forums in nine regions across the state between Feb. 17 and March 1.

The state's special legislative session, which will include redistricting conversations, starts March 20 and runs until April 13.

Gallot's Roadshow will come to Lafayette on Tuesday, Feb. 22 at 6 p.m. in the Acadiana Center for the Arts.